



Volume 23
Issue 3 *September*

Article 24

September 1996

Understanding Disability: From Theory to Practice. Michael Oliver.

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw>



Part of the Social Work Commons

Recommended Citation

(1996) "*Understanding Disability: From Theory to Practice.* Michael Oliver.," *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*: Vol. 23 : Iss. 3 , Article 24.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol23/iss3/24>

This Book Note is brought to you by the Western Michigan University School of Social Work. For more information, please contact wmu-scholarworks@wmich.edu.



Thomas D. Watts, Doreen Elliott and Nazneen Mayadas (Eds), *International Handbook on Social Work Education*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1995. \$99.50 hardcover.

With the increasing availability of communication and transportation technology, areas of the world that once seemed remote are today more accessible. The trend toward a 'global village' makes an international view of social work education a necessity rather than an option. Recognizing this need, the editors of this book have compiled a very useful resource document which presents an international overview of the field. Since social work is diverse enough to defy any simple account of its international dimensions, an attempt to synthesize international social work education is a formidable task. However, Watts, Elliott & Mayadas have addressed the challenge and have provided a comprehensive and informative account.

The book includes examples of social work education drawn from all regions of the world. These examples, which are anchored in a "developmental, comparative and international" (p. 4) orientation, include analyses of social work education in different nations and regions of the world. In addition to covering the major regions of the world, countries at different levels in the development of social work education are included. The various chapters also utilize a number of methodologies such as historical accounts of nations and regions, quantitative surveys, discussions of cultural influences and descriptions of particular systems. The book also includes an overview of the status of international and comparative content being taught in schools of social work. It will be an indispensable guide to international social work education for many years to come.

Michael Oliver, *Understanding Disability: From Theory to Practice*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996. \$39.95 hardcover, \$18.95 papercover.

The pursuit of beauty and physical fitness is today a consuming preoccupation for millions of middle class people. Promoted by the news and entertainment media, and a multi-billion dollar health, fitness and slimming industry, physical perfection has probably never been so highly valued as today. Those who do

not fit the stereotype of the young, athletic, slim and attractive are discarded by an increasingly narcissistic society.

In this climate of self-indulgence, those who are physically impaired are particularly disadvantaged. In addition to being socially outcasted, they are denied opportunities to pursue their economic as well as social well-being. In addition, discrimination against disabled people is reinforced when they are regarded as the unfortunate victims of adverse traumatic events. By viewing disability as an individual problem, the wider role of social forces in labeling, stereotyping and victimizing impaired people is ignored.

The notion that disability is a societal rather than individual problem is the central theme of this important book by Mike Oliver, the first Professor of Disability Studies at a British University. Oliver's book is wide-ranging, discursive and reflective but its message is a powerful one. The problems facing disabled people cannot be resolved until attitudes are changed and a truly inclusive conception of humanity is institutionalized. Since it is highly unlikely that such changes will occur in the near future, the best option for those with disabilities is to challenge the existing order and campaign to improve their position. In view of the indifference, self-absorption and harsh social attitudes of our time, radical action of this kind offer the only viable option for disabled people.